

Democratic and Republican Parties used newspapers as mouthpieces, but, in 1875, the Democratic Party began a more effective use of the papers to achieve electoral victory. The *Wilmington Journal* under editor W. L. Saunders emerged as a leading Democratic organ for the state at this time.⁹²

Thus, the Democrats “redeemed” the state as they secured the governor’s office in 1876 with the re-election of wartime Governor Zebulon Vance. Seen as a watershed year for the Democratic Party, 1876 marked the end of Republican control of state politics.⁹³ Such strongly Democratic

black sharecroppers. The result was that New Hanover’s representation in the House was reduced to two representatives from three. Pender did not follow Conservative plans because, in the first county election, Republicans won all seats. The effort to give Conservatives control of the city government was accomplished by gerrymandering the city’s voting districts. Three wards were created in the city based on equivalents of property values. The result was that wards one and two were located in the city’s center with about 21 % of the population represented there. The other 79% of the population – mostly poor whites and blacks – were lumped into the third ward. Republican boycott of the municipal elections based on the new charter resulted in Conservative elections. The incumbent Republican Board of Aldermen declared the new charter unconstitutional, the election invalid, and refused to turn over control of the city. Conservatives, in the face of a majority of Republicans in the city, had to sue in court over the issue. After four months of litigation and municipal limbo, the Republican Supreme Court declared the gerrymandered wards unconstitutional and the Conservative election void. Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails*, 167 – 171.

⁹² The *Journal* was founded in 1844 and was the first regular daily paper in the city. Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, 605-6; Andrew J. Howell, *The Book of Wilmington*, (Wilmington, 1930) 151.

⁹³ The “negro question” became a real factor in the 1876 election because Democratic candidates developed their first cohesive rebuttals to the Republican party and did not attempt to “placate” black voters in their platforms. The 1876 election was also one of the first campaigns in which the Democratic Party encouraged its candidates to visit voters throughout their constituencies and “stump”

historians as R. D. W. Connor and Samuel A. Ashe described party victories in 1876 as sweeping victories.⁹⁴ Another early twentieth century historian, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, noted that, if not for the “crime” of Reconstruction, control of North Carolina politics would have remained in the hands of the Republican Party.⁹⁵

Legacy of Reconstruction

Reconstruction effectively ended in North Carolina in 1877 as the newly elected Democrats took control of all aspects of state and local governments.⁹⁶ The

for votes throughout the campaign. Haley, *Charles N. Hunter*, 40, 42; Hamilton *Reconstruction*, 648-9.

⁹⁴ R. D. W. Connor, in *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth* described the 1876 election as the “greatest political contest in the history of North Carolina.” Connor further stated that the election “marked the beginning of a new era in NC” and that the “administration of the state government passed into the hands of the party that best represented the intelligence, the property, and the patriotism of North Carolina.” Samuel A. Ashe, in his *History of North Carolina*, explained that, after the 1876 election, the “skies were bright; apparently the storm was over and a rainbow arched the heavens” because “Conservatives under the lead of the patriots in 1861-65 had addressed themselves to the duty of rescuing the people of the state from the domination of the carpetbaggers and Africans.” R. D. W. Connor, *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, Volume II* (Chicago: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1929), 351-2; Samuel A. Ashe, *History of North Carolina, Volume II* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Company, 1925), 1166-67.

⁹⁵ R.D.W. Connor and J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton were principals at Wilmington High School, formerly Tileston, early in their careers and were intimately familiar with the city’s history and leaders. Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, 654, 662.

⁹⁶ To insure control over Wilmington, Conservatives again amended the city’s charter in 1877 with the revisions similar to those in the 1875 version. The city was instead divided into five wards with two aldermen chosen to represent each ward. The city’s center was represented by wards one, two and three with four and five representing Dry Pond to the south, typically made up of lower income whites, and